



GOOD STORIES FOR CHILDREN

By Walt McDougall



HOW HORACE CAUGHT A MOON CALF AND CURED THE SICK

This Boy Minded the Sheep for His Rich Uncle and Met Some Good Friends in the Mountains

He Captured a Strange Animal, Cured All Diseases and Soon Became Both Rich and Famous

IN A beautiful mansion of marble, on a fashionable street, there lived an old millionaire who had so much money that he kept it in barrels in the cellar. The whole house was filled from top to bottom with treasures of all sorts. Statues, paintings, rugs, vases, tapestries and rare old cabinets crowded each other so that there was scarce room to move about. Mr. Higgins, the millionaire, always bought every great picture that was painted, and every art object, but after he had bought them he never enjoyed them at all, never sat and gazed over them or reveled in the beauty of his purchases; yet he was a good judge of a painting. He could sit before a picture of an old beggar or a landscape and point out the fine qualities of the picture as well as the artist could, and show you how cleverly the painter had painted the green grass or the trees, or indicate to you how well done was a still-life picture of a group of German musicians standing at the edge of the sidewalk preparing to play "Annie Laurie." He seemed only to take pleasure in showing his pictures to people who came to his house. But when Mr. Higgins went outside he saw nothing of all these beauties, which he so carefully observed in his paintings. He passed the ragged old beggar-men and women, with an eye blinded to their picturesque rags of many colors; nor did he ever see the little Dutch band as it ground out "Annie Laurie" in front of his rosewood doors; and when he walked along a country road or wandered through the wildwood he saw not the flowers, the waving trees, nor heard the birds singing in the leafy heights above him, for his eyes were always upon the ground in hopes of finding a cent there in the dust, as truly he often did. People who walk with downcast eyes find many pennies and other things in the mud, but lose all the world's beauty by doing so. Mr. Higgins said that the beauty he saw in pictures was the real kind, for he could tell them when he grew tired of them; but the natural kind was worthless to him until it was done in paint.

One day his brother Lemuel, a poor man, came to him and said: "I have a son who is now twelve years old, and who is afflicted with a peculiar disease called Lunar Blastitis or Moon-sickness, which no doctors have yet been able to cure. He cannot bear the moonlight upon him for an instant."

"Well, what's all this to me?" asked Mr. Higgins. "I thought that you might lend me some money, so that I could send him to a great doctor. I have spent all of my own."

"I have scarcely enough for myself," said Mr. Higgins. "I can't waste my substance on boys who go and catch such ridiculous diseases as Moon-sickness."

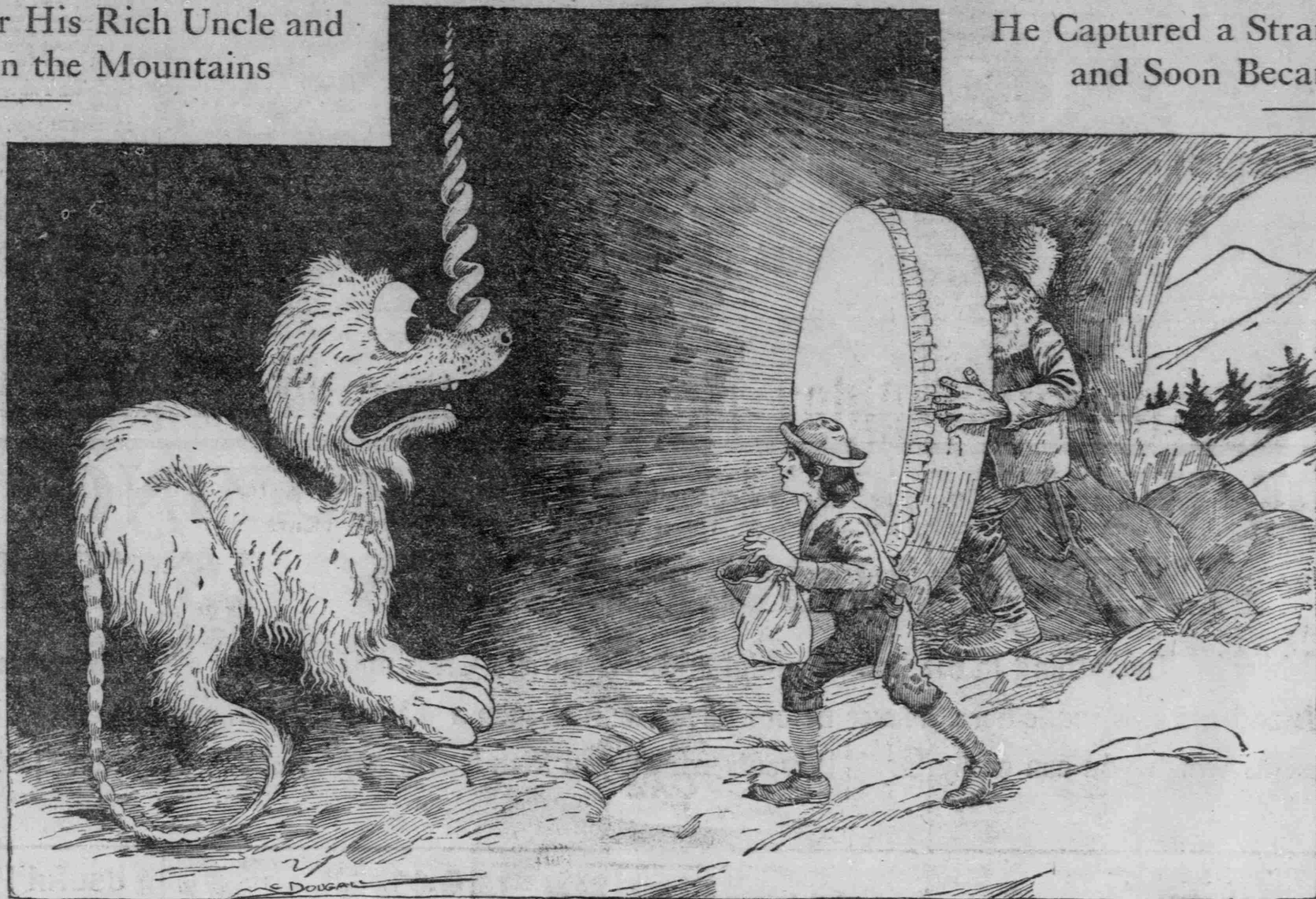
Would Not Help a Poor Boy

So his poor brother departed and soon after died, leaving Horace, his sick son, alone. Horace went to his uncle, but he said that he could not support him in idleness. He said that if he would take care of a herd of Manchurian sheep which he had on a farm near town he would employ him as a shepherd. Horace went to work next day on the farm. He always had to remain within doors during the moonlight nights or carry a black umbrella, for the least touch of the moon's beams caused his flesh to shiver and crack and made his bones ache. On very dark or stormy nights he felt well and recovered some of his strength. His uncle paid him ten dollars a month, and he lived in a little hut far up on a hillside, surrounded by a great flock of sheep. After a time he met an old woman whom all the people thought was a witch, because she cured the hives, mumps and the pips as if by magic, but she was no more of a witch than you are. She had learned all about the properties of many kinds of herbs, and knew which ones would cure such troubles, that was all, and so Horace found himself learning all sorts of wonderful things from her. Old Martha Dilly told him how to gather herbs and prepare them, and pretty soon he had people coming to him to be cured of simple ailments, and it made him very happy.

One day his Uncle Jasper, the millionaire, came to see how the rare Manchurian sheep were faring, and he happened to say that he suffered dreadfully with sleeplessness, not having had a wink for two nights. Horace gave him a package of somnolia leaves and told him to try them that night. His uncle did as he was directed, and slept like a top, but he showed no gratitude to his nephew, although he never was troubled with insomnia afterward. A few months later he came again, hobbling along on a cane and suffering with gout so that he could scarcely walk. Horace again cured him, but he didn't even thank him. Oh, he was an ungrateful, hard-hearted old curmudgeon. Horace did not care, and went right on doing good to all who came his way, and others, I assure you, were not so ungrateful. He received many presents and not a little money in return for his cures, so that he had saved almost enough to go to Philadelphia and see a great physician there and have him pronounce upon his case, for he had found nothing that would cure him, although he had helped so many others. One day his uncle came and said that he now had the asthma, and asked Horace if he could give him something that would allow him to get just one good breath.

"I will give you a dollar," said the millionaire, "if you ease me for a minute or two."

"I can give you relief for a much longer period," said Horace, "and perhaps cure you completely if I can find some herbs that grow away up in the mountains; but it is a long journey, and dangerous, too. No one has ever been to the top of these hills, and nobody knows what may be there so near the clouds. Somebody must care for the sheep while I am gone."



THE MOON CALF CAME CLOSE UP TO THE PAPER MOON

"I will take care of them for one night," said the millionaire. "The air out here will perhaps do me good."

So Horace started away into the mountains, taking some food and his umbrella along. When he had almost reached the top of the highest mountain he came upon a tiny hut among the crags, and, entering its door, he discovered an old man lying upon a bed nearly dead from hunger, for he had broken his leg and could not move. Horace immediately attended to the old man's wants, and soon had the pleasure of seeing him recover. He told the boy that he was a hunter and had been stealing upon a herd of deer, when he had fallen from a high rock into the ravine, from which he had barely managed to drag himself to his hut.

He showed Horace a spot where there grew great quantities of the remedy of which he was in search, and by nightfall the boy was back at his own little sheepfold, but to his surprise he saw nothing of his Uncle Jasper, nor the Manchurian sheep. They had all galloped away as soon as Horace had departed, and the owner had followed them so far that it was several days before he returned. He learned that it is a very difficult matter to care for Manchurian sheep, and he told Horace that he would give him five dollars a month more hereafter, which made him rejoice exceedingly. He gave his uncle the asthma cure, and then he hired another boy to look out for the sheep, while he went up into the mountains again to see the old hunter, for he had told him something which had immensely excited his curiosity. This was nothing else than a careful description of a wonderful animal, of which you have never even dreamed any more than Horace had.

He Hears of the Moon Calf

The old hunter, Ikey Bunn, had described the Apogee or Moon Calf, a creature that is probably the most remarkable of all animals. It is wonderful not only because of its strange shape, but from its peculiar habits. It waxes and wanes with the moon itself, being at the new moon a tiny thing almost invisible, but enlarging as the moon increases in size until at full moon it is a gigantic monster as high as a house, and then it becomes smaller and smaller every hour until it cannot be seen. Where it hides during the dark of the moon was unknown to old Ikey Bunn, but when it is at its greatest size it finds it almost impossible to hide anywhere except in the tallest mountains. Its eyes are like great bowls of shining liquid, lustrous and glowing in the moonlight like fiery balls, and Ikey had seen them many times through the tall hemlocks as it peered out at him in passing down the mountain-side, but it had never attacked him. It had a great corkscrew on its nose, just like that of the rhinoceros—a yellow horn that also seemed as if made of dull fire. Long, sweeping fur enveloped the Moon Calf or Apogee, reaching to the ground and brushing the snow that always covers the mountain's top. Whether it had teeth or not Ikey could not state, but he believed that it had, for he showed no fear of him, merely lying some distance away and watching him as he hurried along. Its tracks in the deep snow showed that it had claws on its feet and a long bushy tail, and he thought that it fed upon the roots of trees, but he had never seen it eating at any time, so he could not be certain as to its diet. He admitted that he was very much afraid of the Apogee, and always hid in his hut when it was full-grown, never venturing out at

night, except during the dark of the moon. But Horace determined to go out at the very first opportunity and see the thing himself, although he was always thrown almost into spasms by the moonlight. The very thought of a moonbeam striking him caused the gooseflesh to rise all over him and a dreadful trembling to overcome him, but still he was resolved to see the Apogee, even if he had to suffer for his curiosity.

The Moon Calf, however, seemed fully as determined to hide from him. He kept himself most carefully hidden every time Horace went abroad with his big black umbrella over his head, and when the boy returned discouraged old Ikey would say: "I told you so. He won't let you see him."

Seventeen times did Horace climb the mountain, and at every stage of the moon, but the Apogee was always in hiding. The old woman one day asked him why he went to the mountains so often, and then Horace told her about the animal that so eluded him.

Learns How to Capture It

"Oh," said Miss Dilly. "I know all about him. That's the Moon Calf; and there's only one way to manage if you want to see him. You must place a looking-glass where he passes, and he will stop. He can't resist taking a peep at himself before he breaks the glass, for he is so homely that the sight of his own face gives him a deep-seated pain. Still, he must look once. Do you know that his horn has the most wonderful power of curing any disease in the world? Yes, it will make the sickest man well, restore lost eyes and do the most marvelous things. The Wizard Hinks more than a thousand years ago caught the Moon Calf in Armenia and managed to break his horn, and he became the greatest physician in the world."

"If I can hold him a minute I'll try to get that horn," said Horace, "for not only do I wish to cure my own trouble, but I'd like to be a doctor, as you know."

"Well," said Miss Dilly, "I'll tell you a secret that I've never revealed to anybody, for I thought it was of no use at all. If you can manage to gather the pollen or dust of the Asphixia, a little flower that grows only on the edges of the deepest and most dangerous precipices, and sprinkle this dust upon the Moon Calf, he will be completely helpless for several hours, and you may do what you will with him."

"Oh, thank you for this!" cried Horace. "How can I reward you?"

"You may reward me by cutting off enough of the Apogee's long fur to make me a cloak, for no cold can penetrate this beautiful, silky fur. That will be my pay, but I am afraid that I will never wear the cloak."

"I think you will wear it this very winter," replied Horace. "I feel as if I were pretty sure to nab that old Moon Calf yet."

"I certainly wish you good luck," said Miss Dilly. "And you deserve it, I think, for you have done a great deal of good to many poor people."

That very night Horace went to his uncle and told him that he would have to hire somebody else to take care of the Manchurian sheep, for he was going to be a hunter. His uncle tried to persuade him to remain, as no one had ever taken such good care of the sheep, but Horace was firm. Then his uncle said that he was an ungrateful lad and that he never would forgive him for deserting him. After Horace was gone Mr. Higgins thought that he had

not paid him enough money, and decided to go after him and offer him twenty dollars a month, thinking that surely would induce him to return to the farm; but not finding him there, he followed him up into the snowy mountains as far as the hut of old Ikey Bunn, where, completely tired out, he laid down to rest and await the hunter's return. Now, old Ikey, much against his will, had gone with Horace to hunt the Moon Calf, but his fears increasing the farther he went from home, he finally sat down in the deep snow and said:

"Tain't no use. I'm all petered out and done up. Can't take another step. I'll stay here till you return, and light a big fire so'se you can get a bit o' warm food when you give up looking for the Apogee, my son."

"First I must search for some of the Asphixia flowers," said Horace, "and that will probably take some time. Fortunately, I know where they grow, so I will hurry to the spot at once. Only be good enough to lend me your hatchet, for I may need it."

Ikey gave him the hatchet, and he hastened to the brink of a dangerous precipice, where he had seen the pale flowers blooming in the snow many times without ever supposing they possessed so marvelous a quality. It did not take him long to gather a great armful, after which he spread his blanket upon the snow and shook the pollen from the petals until he had secured fully a half bushel of the yellow dust, which he put into a big paper bag at once, for fear it might lose some of its wondrous virtue in the brilliant sunshine. Night had almost fallen when he had completed this task, and he went back to the old hunter to assure him of his safety, as well as to get some food. Soon after supper the great, round full moon rose over the snowy mountain and lighted up all the crags almost as brightly as the sunshine had done.

Fooled With a Paper Moon

Horace stole down a deep ravine toward a growth of low hemlock trees to hide, taking a looking-glass with him, for it seemed the very best place for the Moon Calf to secrete himself and feed. Something must have led Horace to these trees, for the animal was actually lying among them at the moment. Horace approached to within a few yards before the Moon Calf saw him, and then it sprang up with a wailing cry and dashed out of the woods like an arrow from the bow. Horace scarcely had time to see its shape before it had vanished in the darkness of the ravine. There was no use in trying to follow it, and so he returned to Ikey Bunn. Ikey was surprised to hear that the Apogee had fled, for he had expected that it would show fight. Therefore he was much relieved. He said he would hunt for it himself the next night.

"There must be some secret place where it hides during the day," said Horace. "Why can't we follow its tracks in the snow until we find its retreat? Perhaps we may come upon it while asleep and have no difficulty at all."

"I never thought of that," said Ikey. "It ought to be easy enough."

So they started at once and, following the big footprints along the ravine over one mountain after another until their legs ached, they came at last to an immense cave, the opening of which was larger than any house, and the tracks led right into it. Horace plunged into it, but in a minute or two found that the darkness was so intense that he could not proceed without a torch, and this they had neglected to provide.

"We might build a big fire and smoke him out," said Ikey.

"That would never do," replied Horace, "for I must catch him alive. We must think of some other method. I have it! We will make a moon ourselves and fool him!"

Ikey was amazed, but when Horace explained his plan he was delighted. They returned to the hunter's cabin, and there they made a big tissue paper moon and placed a candle inside, and then, rolling the paper moon along over the snow, they arrived at the cave about sunset next day. The very newest footprints showed that the Apogee had gone in to sleep, and as there were no tracks pointing outward, they knew that he was still within.

They waited until it grew dark, and then lighted the candle inside of the big paper moon. It glowed magnificently and made so perfect an imitation that you or I would have been deceived into thinking that it really was the moon rising. It deceived the Moon Calf at once, for just as soon as the candle was lighted it saw the false moon from far back in the cave, where it was sleeping, and, thinking that it had overslept, it sprang up, shook itself hastily and came to the mouth of the cave, drowsily blinking its eyes, as it was only half awake. It came close to the paper moon before it seemed to realize that something was wrong, for Ikey, who held the moon up, began to tremble and make the moon wobble. No one had ever seen a wobbly moon before, and it caused the animal to pause and sniff the air, therefore it instantly detected that men were present. For a moment it hesitated, considering whether to retreat into the cavern or rush past them and escape in the open air. Standing upon its hind legs and glaring at the imitation moon, it suddenly sprang forward with incredible quickness, overturning both the false moon and the old hunter. It was not quick enough to avoid the shower of Asphixia powder that Horace hurled at its head, however. The gleaming yellow dust fell in a cloud all around its head, blinding and confusing it. Handful after handful Horace showered upon it as it twisted this way and that in its blind endeavor to find a way of escape, and meanwhile it walked all over the old hunter on the ground. Soon it staggered against the wall, tottered for an instant and then fell with a heavy thud senseless at the boy's feet, while Ikey crawled away to the cavern's mouth. Horace placed the overturned moon upright, punched a hole in the paper so that he would have more light, and examined the Apogee curiously. It was a wonderful creature as it lay there so still and helpless. He took out his knife and proceeded to cut off immense quantities of the long, silky fur until he had a great pile—more than enough for three cloaks, for he meant to have one for Ikey and himself, as well as for Miss Dilly. Then, taking the hunter's hatchet, he chopped off the twisted corkscrew horn on the nose of the animal, which, as he chopped, gave forth a peculiar odor like some strange spice.

Cured of His Own Disease

When he had severed the horn from the Apogee's nose—and it didn't take him long, I assure you—he saw that the moon had risen and was shining full upon him, but such was the magic power of the Moon Calf's horn that, even in touching it, he had already been cured. A wonderful feeling was in him and his whole body glowed with strength. The moonlight even seemed to fill him with a marvelous happiness instead of shriveling him up, as it had formerly done. As he was wondering at his newfound health he heard a faint voice calling far away in the darkness of the cavern, and in another moment he recognized the voice of his Uncle Jasper. He took the candle out of the artificial moon and went into the cave. Soon he came to a vast hall, whose roof was so high that he could not see it, and there upon the floor lay his uncle, the old millionaire, gasping for breath. The old man had sought for Horace until he had been lost in the mountain, and, wandering around in the dark, he had come upon the Apogee, who had promptly pounced upon him and carried him to its cavern. Perhaps it didn't mean to hurt him, but it had lain upon him all day to keep him securely, and crushed all of his breath out of him, so that he had fainted. Hearing his nephew's voice in the cave, he had revived and called for help.

His capture by the Apogee must have produced some strange effect upon Mr. Higgins, for he now felt very grateful, and told Horace that he could come and live with him, but Horace declined, saying that he was going to be a great doctor.

He did become a great doctor truly, for with the wondrous yellow pollen he could cure any sickness, and everybody that came to him went away well, so that in a very short time he was not only very rich, but very famous, while people from all over the world came to him to be cured. When, finally, Uncle Jasper Higgins died of old age, he got his magnificent household of pictures and things, but he always was fonder of the real beauties of nature than of all his paintings and statues. Old Miss Dilly still wears her wonderful cloak, and, as she lives with Horace, you may yourself have seen her wearing it when he takes her out driving at night, for, strange to say, now that he is perfectly well, he can't get enough of the moonlight, which is not wonderful, considering that he had been deprived of that pleasure all his life long.

As for the Apogee, it has not been seen more than three times since it lost its horn. Whether it is growing a new one or not I cannot say; but Ikey, who saw it once, says that its fur is grown long again, and he thinks it will eventually develop another horn on its nose.

WALT MCDUGALL

